

State Library Bulletin

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GUIDE TO THE STUDY

OF

JAMES ABBOTT McNEILL WHISTLER

COMPILED BY

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JAMES ABBOTT McNEILL WHISTLER

SALIENT POINTS IN HIS LIFE

Whistler was born, according to his own statement, in St Petersburg, Russia, of American parents; according to Champlin's *Cyclopedia of painters and paintings*, Lippincott's *Biographical dictionary* and Appleton's *Cyclopedia of American biography* in Lowell, Massachnsetts, in 1834. Mr Theodore Child in his article in *Harper's magazine* of September, 1889, gives the artist's birth-place as Baltimore, and a personal friend declares that he was born in Stonington, Connecticut. It is said that Whistler delights in keeping up the mystery of his nativity. His father was Major George Washington Whistler, an engineer of wide reputation. His mother was Anna Matilda McNeill, a daughter of Dr C. D. McNeill, of Wilmington, N. C.

Several years of Whistler's early youth were spent in Russia; his father, in 1842, having accepted the invitation of Emperor Nicholas to superintend the construction of the St Petersburg and Moscow railroad. Young Whistler came to America shortly after his father's death in St Petersburg, in April, 1849.

In 1851, at the age of 16 years and 11 months, he entered the United States military academy, at West Point, receiving his appointment as a delegate at large from President Fillmore.

His career at the academy was unsuccessful. At the end of his first year his rank was 42 in a class of 60. In his second year he was absent on account of ill health, and was examined in only one subject, drawing, in which he obtained the highest possible mark. At the June examinations, 1854, his third year, he was found deficient, and recommended for discharge. Throughout the three years of his course Whistler's name appears in the West Point

Register very near the foot of the general demerit and conduct rolls of his class.

It is not without interest to note that Major Marcus A. Reno, who was dismissed from the United States army in 1880, owing to the official censure of his conduct during the Custer expedition of 1876 against the Sioux Indians, was one of Whistler's classmates.

In less than two years after leaving West Point, Whistler went to England, to remain, however, only for a short time.

In 1856, he was settled in Paris and hard at work in the studio of the famous genre painter, Charles Gabriel Gleyre, where he remained for two years and where he began in earnest his life's work. Among his fellow students were George Du Maurier, Mr Armstrong and Edward John Poynter, R. A., author of the much discussed painting, *Diadumene*.

In 1859 and 1860, Whistler's paintings were refused at the Paris salon.

Whistler settled in London in 1863, taking up his residence on the Embankment, and beginning at once to draw his subjects from scenes most nearly at hand, the life of the Thames.

It was in this same year, 1863, that he made a second attempt to have his pictures hung in the Paris salon. They were rejected, but the Salon des Refusés accepted them, thereby enabling him to appeal against the judgment of the critics who had refused him recognition. Among the accepted pictures was the *White girl*. It did more for Whistler than make a sensation. It caused Paris to speak of him as one of the "original" artists of the day.

In 1877, Whistler exhibited a collection of his works at the Grosvenor gallery, London, on invitation of its owner, Sir Coutts Lindsay.

In November, 1878, Whistler brought suit against Ruskin on the ground that Ruskin had libeled him in a criticism on one of his pictures exhibited at the Grosvenor gallery, called *A nocturne in black and gold*; a night view of Cremorne, with fireworks. The criticism complained of appeared in *Fors Clavigera*, and is as follows:

"For Mr Whistler's own sake, no less than for the protection of the purchaser, Sir Coutts Lindsay ought not to have admitted works into the gallery in which the ill educated conceit of the artist so

nearly approached the aspect of wilful imposture. I have seen and heard much of cockney impudence before now, but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask 200 guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face."

Whistler claimed that this criticism had injured the sale of his paintings; Ruskin that it was simply a fair and *bona fide* criticism on a painting which the plaintiff had exposed for public view.

The jury rendered a verdict against Ruskin, and placed the damages at one farthing.

In 1886 Whistler was made president of the Society of British artists.

On January 30, 1892, he was created an officer of the Legion of Honor by the French government.

Whistler has now, 1892, deserted England as he did America, and spends most of his time in Paris, where he receives more attention and where his works are more favorably criticized than in any other of the great art centers.

PERSONALITY

Mr Whistler has always an electric manner, one feels it at once. It is specially notable when he is standing at his easel with brain, hand and eye all working in perfect sympathy, inspired by the joy and difficulty of his art.—*Illustrated news*, Apr. 9, 1892, p. 348

He is a harum scarum genius; keeps none of his work, makes no records, gives no help to any one who wants to help him; generally makes no answers to letters.

. . . for I had hoped . . . to have listened to his delightful talk, which, though gay, witty and alert, is always simple, serious and dignified when referring to the art he loves so well and practises with so sure a mastery.—*Illustrated news*, Apr. 9, 1892, p. 348

WORKS

Etchings (arranged, as far as known, chronologically)

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1 Early portrait of Whistler, 1857 (?) | 7 Unsafe tenement |
| 2 Annie Haden, 1857 (?) | 8 Dog on the kennel |
| 3 Dutchman holding the glass | 9 La Mère Gérard |
| 4 Liverdun (Near Toul, in Lorraine) | 10 La Mère Gérard stooping |
| 5 La Ré fameuse | 11 Street at Saverne |
| 6 En plein soleil | 12 Gretchen at Heidelberg |

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|--|--|
| 13 Little Arthur | 56 Venus, 1859 |
| 14 La Vieille aux Loques | 57 Annie Haden, 1860 |
| 15 Annie | 58 Mr Mann, 1860 |
| 16 La marchande de moutarde | 59 Sketch at Limehouse (Unfinished) |
| 17 The rag gatherers | 60 Rotherhithe |
| 18 Fumette | 61 Axenfeld, 1860 |
| 19 The kitchen | 62 The engraver, 1860 |
| 20 Title to the French set, 1858 | 63 The forge, 1861 |
| 21 Auguste Delâtre | 64 Joe, 1861 |
| 22 A little boy (Portrait of Seymour Haden, the younger) | 65 The miser |
| 23 Seymour | 66 Vauxhall bridge, 1861 |
| 24 Annie; seated | 67 Millbank, 1861 |
| 25 Reading by lamplight | 68 The punt, 1861 |
| 26 The music room | 69 Sketching |
| 27 Soupe à trois sous | 70 Westminster bridge in progress (Unfinished) 1861 |
| 28 Bibi Valentin, 1859 | 71 Little Wapping, 1861 |
| 29 Reading in bed | 72 The little pool, 1861 |
| 30 Bibi Lalouette, 1859 | 73 Tiny pool |
| 31 The wine glass | 74 Ratcliffe highway |
| 32 Greenwich pensioner, 1859 | 75 Encamping, 1861 |
| 33 Greenwich park | 76 Ross Winans |
| 34 Nursemaid and child | 77 The Storm, 1861 |
| 35 Thames warehouses, from Thames tunnel pier, 1859 | 78 Little Smithfield |
| 36 Westminster bridge, 1859 | 79 Codogan pier
Called "Early morning, Battersea" |
| 37 Limehouse, 1859 | 80 Old Hungerford bridge |
| 38 A whark (Unfinished sketch) | 81 Chelsea wharf, 1863 |
| 39 Tyzac, Whiteley and co., 1859 | 82 Amsterdam; etched from the Tolhuis, 1863 |
| 40 Black Lion wharf, 1859 | 83 Weary, 1863 |
| 41 The pool, 1859 | 84 Shipping at Liverpool, 1867 |
| 42 Thames police, 1859 | 85 Chelsea bridge and church |
| 43 Long-shore men, 1859 | 86 Speke hall, 1870 |
| 44 The lime burner, 1859 | 87 Model resting, 1870 |
| 45 Billingsgate, 1859 | 88 Whistler's mother |
| 46 Landscape with the horse, 1859 | 89 Swan brewery, 1872 |
| 47 Arthur Seymour (Arthur Seymour Haden) | 90 Fosco, 1872 |
| 48 Becquet (Known also as "The fiddler") | 91 Velvet dress (Portrait of Mrs Leyland) 1873 |
| 49 Astruc, a literary man, 1859
This etching is the dry point portrait often known as "Davis" | 92 Little velvet dress, 1873 |
| 50 Fumette standing, 1859 | 93 F. R. Leyland |
| 51 Fumette's bent head | 94 Fanny Leyland, 1873 |
| 52 Whistler (the artist), 1859 | 95 Elinor Leyland |
| 53 Drouet, 1859 | 96 Florence Leyland |
| 54 Finette (A public dancer) | 97 Reading a book |
| 55 Paris: the Isle de la Cité, 1859
(View looking along the Seine) | 98 Tatting |
| | 99 Maude |
| | 100 Maude, seated, 1873 |
| | 101 The beach, 1873 |

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|--|-----------------------------|
| 102 Tillie: a model, 1873 | 147 Hurlingham |
| 103 Seated girl | 148 Fulham |
| 104 The desk (Unfinished) | 149 The little Venice, 1880 |
| 105 Resting | 150 Nocturne |
| 106 Agnes | 151 The little mast |
| 107 Model lying down | 152 The little lagoon |
| 108 Two sketches | 153 The palaces |
| 109 The boy | 154 The doorway |
| 110 Swinburne (Algernon Charles Swinburne, the poet) | 155 The piazzetta |
| 111 A lady at a window | 156 The traghetto |
| 112 Child on a couch | 157 The riva |
| 113 Sketch of a girl; nude | 158 Two doorways |
| 114 Steamboats off the tower | 159 The beggars |
| 115 The little forge, 1875 | 160 The mast |
| 116 Two ships, 1875 | 161 Doorway and vine |
| 117 The piano | 162 Wheelwright |
| 118 Scotch widow, 1875 | 163 San Biagio |
| 119 Speke shore | 164 Bead stringers |
| 120 Dam Wood, 1875 | 165 Turkeys |
| 121 Shipbuilder's yard, 1875 | 166 Fruit stall |
| 122 Guitar player (Portrait of Ridley, the artist) | 167 San Giorgio |
| 123 London bridge | 168 Nocturne palaces |
| 124 Price's candle works | 169 Long lagoon |
| 125 Battersea; dawn | 170 Temple |
| 126 The muff | 171 The bridge |
| 127 Sketch of ships | 172 Upright Venice |
| 128 Riverside sketch (Unfinished) | 173 Little court |
| 129 The troubled Thames | 174 Lobster pots |
| 130 Sketch from Billingsgate | 175 The riva; number two |
| 131 Fishing-boats, Hastings, 1877 | 176 Drury lane |
| 132 Wych street, 1877 | 177 The balcony |
| 133 Temple Bar | 178 Fishing-boat |
| 134 Free trade wharf, 1877 | 179 Ponte Piovan |
| Sometimes called the Little limehouse | 180 Garden |
| 135 Thames towards Erith | 181 The Rialto |
| 136 Lindsay houses, 1878 | 182 Long Venice |
| 137 From Pickled Herring Stairs | 183 Furnace nocturne |
| 138 Lord Wolseley | 184 Quiet canal |
| 139 Irving as Charles First | 185 Salute; dawn |
| From the painting of the same subject | 186 Lagoon; noon |
| 140 St James street | 187 Murano; glass furnace |
| 141 Under Battersea bridge | 188 Fish shop; Venice |
| 142 Whistler, with the white lock, 1879 | 189 The dyer |
| 143 The large pool, 1879 | 190 Little salute |
| 144 The "Adam and Eve;" Old Chelsea | 191 Wool-carders |
| 145 Putney bridge | 192 Regent's quadrant |
| 146 The Little Putney, 1879 | 193 Islands |
| | 194 Nocturne: shipping |
| | 195 Old women |

196 Alderney street	206 The seamstress
197 The smithy	207 Sketch in St James's park
198 Stables	208 A fragment of Piccadilly, 1885
199 Nocturne: salute.	209 Old clothes shop
200 Dordrecht	210 Fruit shop
201 A corner of the Palais royal	211 Sketch on the Embankment
202 Sketch at Dieppe	212 The Menpes children
203 A booth at a fair	213 The steps
204 Cottage door	214 Fish shop, Chelsea
205 Village sweet shop	215 Zaandam

This list of etchings is taken from Mr Wedmore's catalog, which was kindly loaned for the purpose by Mr S. P. Avery, of New York city. The catalog supplies almost a complete list of Whistler's etchings from 1857, when, as a young man in Paris, he issued his first plate, to 1886, and is an invaluable aid to the collector or student of Whistler. It gives under each subject a full description of the etching, as far as possible the date of its execution, size, exact signature, and other means of identification, proofs and impressions, rarity, etc.

Mr Wedmore's catalog is also an excellent guide to Mr Avery's Whistler collection, which contains all the etchings mentioned in it, except nos. 56, 88, 93, 97, 99, 104-11, 113, 119, 127, 129, 133, 138, 139, 189, 191, 194, 198, 202, 204, 205, 207, 210-12, and 214.

Collections of Whistler's etchings hang in the Queen's library at Windsor and in the British museum.

Sets

Whistler is the author of four series of plates, known as the *French set*, *Thames set*, *Venice set*, *first séries and Venice set*, *second series*. The works which make up these sets are as follows:

French set, 13 etchings, 1858, printed by Delâtre, Paris:

Liverdun	La vieille aux loques
La Ré fameuse	Annie
En plein soleil	La marchande de moutarde
Unsafe tenement	The kitchen
La Mère Gérard	Title to the French set
Street at Saverne	Auguste Delâtre
Little Arthur	

Thames set, 16 etchings, publicly issued in 1871 (printing not successful):

Thames warehouses, from the Thames	Westminster bridge
tunnel pier	Lincolnhouse

Tyzac, Whiteley and co.	The forge
Black Lion wharf	Millbank
The pool	The little pool
Thames police	Codogan pier
The lime burner	Old Hungerford bridge
Becquet	Chelsea bridge and church
Rotherhithe	

Venice set, first series, 12 etchings, 1880, issued by the Fine art society :

The little Venice	The piazzetta
Nocturne	The traghetto
The little mast	The riva
The little lagoon	Two doorways
The palaces	The beggars
The doorway	The mast

Venice set, second series, 26 etchings, 21 Venetian subjects, five English subjects, 1886, issued by Dowdeswell :

Doorway and vine	Lobster pots
Wheelwright	The riva, number two
San Biagio	Drury lane
Bead stringers	The balcony
Turkeys	Fishing boat
Fruit stall	Ponte Piovan
San Giorgio	Garden
Nocturne palaces	The Rialto
Long lagoon	Long Venice
Temple	Furnace nocturne
The bridge	Quiet canal
Upright Venice	Salute ; dawn
Little court	Lagoon ; noon

Paintings

The angry sea	Great fire wheel, 1883
Arrangement in brown	Harmony in amber and black
At the piano, 1867	Harmony in brown and black, 1884
The balcony: arrangement in flesh color and green. No. 2	A Japonaiserie: caprice in purple and gold
Blue girl, 1882	Lange Leizen — of the six marks; an arrangement of Japanese drapery and china
The blue wave; Biarritz	
Coast of Brittany, 1863	Last of Old Westminster, 1863
Entrance to Southampton water, 1882	Little Sweetstuff shop: note in orange
The falling rocket	Little white girl
Fragment of old Battersea bridge by moonlight: nocturne in blue and silver, 1882	Night view of Cremorne, with fireworks: nocturne in black and gold
Gold girl, 1878	Nocturne in black and silver

Nocturne in blue and gold, 1878	Portrait of my mother: arrangement in gray and black, 1872
Nocturne in blue and green, 1878	Portrait of Señor Pablo Sarasate: arrangement in black
Nocturne with the falling rocket	Portrait of Miss Spartali in a Japanese costume
Nocturne with Valparaiso harbour	Portrait of Ross Whistler, 1862
The Pacific: arrangement in gray and green	Portrait of Thomas D. Whistler, 1862
Portrait of Miss Alexander: harmony in gray and green, 1888	Portrait of himself
Portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell: arrangement in black, 1888	Princesse du pays de la porcelaine, 1865
Portrait of Thomas Carlyle: arrangement in black and gray, 1872	St Mark's, Venice; blue and gold
Portrait of Miss Rosa Corder: arrangement in brown and black	Sea and rain
Portrait of Henry Irving as Philip 2, of Spain: arrangement in black	Symphony in white, No. 3
Portrait of Lady Meux	View of the river at Chelsea; blue and silver
	Westminster bridge, 1863
	White girl, 1862

Of the paintings mentioned, the Arrangement in brown, Fragment of Old Battersea bridge, Harmony in amber and black, Night view of Cremorne, Nocturne in blue and gold, Portrait of Carlyle and Portrait of Irving were exhibited at the Grosvenor gallery; Portrait of my mother and At the piano, at the Royal academy; the Portrait of Carlyle, Portrait of my mother and Princesse du pays de la porcelaine, at the Paris salon, and the Portrait of Miss Alexander and the Portrait of Lady Campbell, at Munich. The balcony was exhibited at the Paris universal exhibition of 1889, and the White girl at the Salon des Refusés. Whistler has also exhibited his works in the Dudley gallery and at the Hague, where he was awarded a gold medal.

The Portrait of my mother was recently purchased by the Luxembourg gallery, Paris, and the Portrait of Carlyle, by the corporation of Glasgow.

Books

Ten o'clock. Boston, 1888

The gentle art of making enemies
New York, 1890

SCHOOL

It is almost impossible to class Mr Whistler with any particular school. "His work" . . . says Mr Brownell, "is . . . now accepted as typical, and made to stand for a class of art, or at least a manner of painting, of which the friends and foes are ardent and fluent." What this class is it is hard to say. He is most nearly

associated, perhaps, with the impressionist school, yet he is not an impressionist in the strict sense of the word.

“The impressionists,” says Mr Hamerton, “are a new sect, composed, as all new sects in painting invariably are, of young men who have not yet definitely formed their styles. . . . They go to nature and receive an impression . . . and the purpose of their art is to render the impression as a whole, without either the painful study of parts or any scientific arrangement of material.” “In other words,” quoting Mr Brownell again, “impressionism implies, first of all, impatience of detail. And, so far, Mr Whistler may justly be called an impressionist. . . . But to associate him with a new sect, composed of young men who have not yet definitely formed their style, would be absurd ; and an intimation that his works are lacking in the study of parts or arrangement of material, would be false.”

CRITICISM

Perhaps the most typical painter and the most absolute artist of the time.—*Scribner's monthly*, 18 : 495

His etchings are universally praised ; but his paintings are both abused and admired.—*International cyclopaedia*

Nothing can be more foreign to his art than set purposes ; the song of a bird is not more absolutely unconscious.—*Scribner's monthly*, 18 : 488

It would be difficult to find a better example of a pure painter, a painter to whom art is so distinct a thing in itself, and so unrelated to anything else.—*Scribner's monthly*, 18 : 487

Mr Whistler's etchings attract a good deal of attention, and differ from his paintings in meriting it. They display a free hand and a keen eye for effect. Three of the oil pictures are blurred, foggy, and imperfect marine pieces. The fourth is called the “White girl,” and represents a powerful female with red hair, and a vacant stare in her soulless eyes. She is standing on a wolfskin hearthrug, for what reason is unrecorded. The picture evidently means vastly more than it expresses, albeit expressing too much. Notwithstanding an obvious want of purpose, there is some boldness in the handling and a singularity in the glare of the colors which can not fail to divert the eye, and to weary it.—H. T. TUCKERMAN, *Book of the Artists*, p. 485

The qualities of few painters are so distinct, and indeed one is tempted to say aggressive. Every one will perceive in his slightest etching an effectiveness, an impressiveness, a form which may or may not justly be called eccentric, but which it is impossible not to recognize as original.—*Scribner's monthly*, 18:486

One can scarcely be as admirable in all ways as Mr Whistler is, and still touch the highest point in any one way.—*Scribner's monthly*, 18:495

Mr Whistler, in prose, is always pungent. Mr Whistler, in art, is always suggestive in more ways than one.—*New York tribune*, Mar. 20, 1892, p. 14, col. 6

Mr Whistler's suggestiveness is felt in the moods which his etchings call up. It is this expressiveness, this going directly to the core of the subject, this giving its fullest meaning to every line laid on the copper, which discloses in Mr Whistler's best work his affinity with Rembrandt and shows him to be an artist quickly responsive to human feeling.—S. R. KOEHLER, *Etching*, p. 162

For with Mr Whistler's equipment, and energy and genius, the surprising thing about him is that there should be any discussion concerning his position as a painter, that he should not have vindicated his ability by something of unmistakably large importance.—*Scribner's monthly*, 18:495

And the nature of his ideal is singularly pure and high. It is this which, after all, finally measures an artist, the character of his ideal, his attitude toward absolute beauty, his conception of what is best in the visible world and the world that is to be divined.—*Scribner's monthly*, 18:488

Portrait of his mother. In the latter of the two portraits to which I have already referred (that of his mother), there is an expression of living character, an intensity of pathetic power, which gives to that noble work something of the impressiveness proper to a tragic or elegiac poem.—A. C. SWINBURNE, *Fortnightly review*, 49:745

White girl. The White girl is certainly a lovely picture, but its loveliness has a marked individuality. Nothing could be more delightful than the simplicity and delicacy of line and hue of this figure, nothing more graceful than her attitude, or more subtly charming than the broad harmonies worked out by the dark hair

and the lily, the white drapery, and the soft fur upon which she stands. On the other hand, no one can fail to note the sense of character which pervades its loveliness, and to observe how its individuality is quite as strong as its beauty is charming.—W. C. BROWNELL, *Scribner's monthly*, 18:490

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